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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 302nd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 3 July 2007, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

2. **The Chairman** said that, the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine had been held in Pretoria on 9 and 10 May, followed by the United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace on 11 May, also in Pretoria.

3. On 10 May, the Secretary-General had appointed three international experts to the Board of the Register of Damage Caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On the following day, the Bureau of the Committee had issued a statement noting the appointment and expressing the hope that the office of the Register of Damage would begin implementing without delay General Assembly resolution A/RES/ES-10/17.

4. On 15 May, the Secretary-General had appointed Michael C. Williams of the United Kingdom as his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

5. On 30 May, the Quartet Principals had met in Berlin and issued a statement calling for all Palestinians to immediately renounce all acts of violence and respect the ceasefire in Gaza.

6. On 7 June, the Committee had held a special meeting to mark forty years of occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Bureau of the Committee had issued a statement on that occasion.

7. Factional violence had intensified throughout the first half of June, particularly in Gaza, and had culminated in the takeover of the Gaza Strip by the Executive Force and militia of Hamas. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, in response, had dissolved the national unity government and declared a state of emergency. On 17 June, President Abbas had sworn in an emergency cabinet and outlawed the Hamas militia.

8. On 25 June, a summit meeting between President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had been held at Sharm el-Sheikh. They had been joined by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan. The summit had been followed by high-level diplomatic contacts by the major regional and international stakeholders to discuss the latest developments.

9. On 26 June, the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East had been organized by the Department of Public Information (DPI) in Tokyo. He had sent a message to the seminar as Chairman of the Committee.

10. On 26 and 27 June, the Quartet envoys had met in Jerusalem and had decided to appoint Mr. Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, as the Quartet Representative.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

11. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) lamented the tragic events that had occurred in the Gaza Strip. The takeover of Gaza by Hamas was a coup d'état and an act alien to the democratic traditions of Palestinian people. It had created a situation that was similar to the period before 1967, when the Palestinian lands had been fragmented. The unity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which had been realized by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, was now in danger. The emergency Palestinian Government would work to restore order and security, return Gaza to its pre-coup state, and ensure that the fragmentation of the Palestinian lands would not be perpetuated.

12. The Palestinian Government was facing Israeli military operations in both Gaza and the West Bank, which had compounded the difficulties faced by the emergency Government and sabotaged its efforts to carry out its mandate. He called on the international community to compel Israel to halt its aggression, thus allowing the Palestinian Authority to exercise control over all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

13. President Abbas had gone to the Sharm el-Sheikh summit with high expectations. However, there had been no breakthrough in the political process or on final status negotiations after more than 40 years of occupation. The outcomes of the summit had been that Israel should release the tax revenues of the Palestinian Authority, release Palestinian prisoners and minimize the difficulty of movement for all Palestinians. It remained to be seen whether Israel would keep its promises.

14. Without a political breakthrough shortly, an end to the occupation and an improvement in the economic situation, people would lose hope, take the law into their own hands and become even more radicalized. The Palestinian people looked to their friends and the international community to exert the pressure necessary to force a political breakthrough.

15. In conclusion, he thanked the Arab countries, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Quartet and the European Union (EU) for supporting President Abbas and the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority Government. He expected that the Committee would adopt a similar position in defence of the legitimacy of the Palestinian political institutions under the leadership of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

16. **The Chairman** said that he was sure the Committee would heed the appeal to take a stand in support of the legitimate Palestinian Government.

17. **Mr. Whitley** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that, largely owing to intense inter-factional fighting, June had been the bloodiest month on record in Gaza. The death toll had been 149 Palestinians, including two staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and four students. There had also been a sharp upturn in the firing of home-made rockets and mortars by militant factions from Gaza into Israel.

18. Worsening violence and lawlessness verging on chaos had caused international organizations, including UNRWA, to further reduce the presence of international staff. UNRWA had been obliged to take the unprecedented step of briefly halting its regular education and health services.

19. The humanitarian situation remained highly precarious. It had stabilized in recent days, but retained the potential to worsen considerably again. After a 16-day complete shutdown, the commercial crossing point at Karni had been reopened, although it was operating on a limited basis. While the Israeli Government had been attentive to the need for humanitarian goods to enter, that was not enough. Many essential items were in short supply or unavailable.

20. Commercial imports and exports were essential for Gazans to survive and limit their already heavy dependency on foreign aid. UNRWA and the World Food Programme (WFP) were distributing 17,000 metric tonnes of food a month, supporting 80 per cent of the population. But the people concerned were not receiving an adequate diet from those rations. In fact, according to the Palestinian Shippers Council, the Israeli customs had stopped clearing any containers destined for Gaza. The prohibition on the entry of construction materials had been eased slightly, but the lack of materials had forced UNRWA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to halt work on construction projects costing over $150 million. Instead of Karni, the Israeli authorities had encouraged the use of smaller crossing points. Those crossing points had insufficient capacity to meet the needs of UNRWA and their use had increased the costs of bringing in humanitarian goods. The Karni crossing point must immediately be completely opened; otherwise there would be a humanitarian disaster.

21. Regardless of political conflicts, the main concern of UNRWA was to ensure a stable environment in which it could continue to deliver essential services to the population. In that regard, it would continue to work with whoever was the local authority. In the short to medium term, there could be no substitute for the full functioning of the Access and Movement Agreement of November 2005. Without it, the downward spiral would continue. He hoped that the emergency Government would succeed in overcoming the divisions within the Palestinian camp and allow the Palestinian people to resume their march towards self-determination.

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine, 9 and 10 May 2007, and the United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, 11 May 2007, Pretoria

22. **The Chairman** said that the objective of the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine and the United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace had been to encourage broad international action, including by African States and African civil society, in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

23. During the course of the Meeting, the theme of which had been "African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights", experts had reviewed the situation in the Occupied

Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and discussed international efforts aimed at achieving a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace and ways to strengthen African solidarity with the Palestinian people's aspirations for independence and statehood.

24. The Meeting, which had been attended by representatives of 58 Governments, 4 intergovernmental organizations, 5 United Nations agencies and funds, and 20 civil society organizations, as well as special guests of the host country and media, university and research institute representatives, had generated significant media interest and been a great success. Essop Pahad, Minister in the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, had delivered the opening address, in which he had urged the international community to recognize unconditionally, engage in dialogue with, and lift all restrictions on, the newly established Palestinian national unity Government; support the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative; and take appropriate action to address the humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people. The situation on the ground demanded creative leadership by Palestinians and Israelis and the sustained commitment of the international community, particularly those with interests in the region or ties to regional players. During the plenary sessions, 15 experts from Africa, North America, Europe and the Middle East, including Palestinians and Israelis, had made statements. Eight additional experts had spoken at the Forum.

25. At the closing session, participants had adopted a Final Document, in which they had expressed the view that an independent State of Palestine could benefit from the experience of African States in their quest for decolonization, independence, sovereignty and an end to apartheid, as well as Africa's experience on the path to economic independence and sustainable development; had stressed the important role played by African States in wider efforts aimed at the resumption of the political process and the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and, in that context, had called for an enhanced contribution by Africa to the Middle East peace process and increased African action in regional and international forums.

26. Furthermore, the participants had expressed great concern at the continuing deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a crisis which, in their view, was further compounded by the withholding of direct donor assistance to the Palestinian Authority; had deplored the fact that much of the Palestinian budgetary shortfall was caused by Israel's illegal withholding of the customs and tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority; and, in that regard, had called on the Government of Israel to immediately and unconditionally release the remaining funds and resume regular monthly payments in accordance with bilateral agreements.

27. Lastly, the participants had criticized Israel's routinely disproportionate and indiscriminate military operations in Palestinian population centres; had noted that significant Israeli settlement activity continued across the entire occupied West Bank and in and around occupied East Jerusalem; had further noted that construction of the wall inside the West Bank continued at an accelerated pace in complete disregard of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the relevant United Nations resolutions; and had called on all Governments, intergovernmental organizations and others to meet their legal obligations faced with Israel's non-compliance and take appropriate actions.

28. The United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace had taken place after the African Meeting and had been attended by experts from NGOs and representatives of civil society institutions, Governments and intergovernmental organizations. A frank and useful debate had taken place on issues such as the public perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the impact and responsibility of academic institutions and the role of civil society in raising public awareness.

29. In accordance with established practice, the reports of the Meeting and the Forum would be issued in due course as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights. Copies of the final document had also been posted on the Division website.

30. If there were no comments, he would take it that the Committee wished to take note of the report.

31. *It was so decided.*

Fifteenth International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, 26 and 27 June, Tokyo

32. **Mr. Dorani** (Chief of the Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section, Department of Public Information) said that the fifteenth International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, held against a

backdrop of great uncertainty and difficulty on the ground, had opened with an appeal for an end to the violence and for renewed dialogue at all levels. In his opening statement, Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, had stressed that the Seminar's objective was not only to sensitize the public about the situation in the Middle East, but also to provide impetus and support for dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians and help them sustain their hopes for a peaceful future.

33. The two-day event — entitled "Re-engaging the Israelis and the Palestinians in the search for a comprehensive and lasting political settlement" — had been organized by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Government of Japan and the United Nations University in Tokyo. Many people had felt that the Seminar should have been postponed owing to events in Gaza and the resulting political and humanitarian concerns. However, the Department of Public Information had been confident that the Seminar, which sought to build confidence for the prospects for peace from the bottom up, was even more valuable in the light of heightened tensions and uncertainties on the ground. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had said that he was fully aware of the power and responsibilities of the media and expressed the hope that its members would continue to write not only about the problems facing Israelis and Palestinians, but also about opportunities for advancing the peace process and positive signs of cooperation for the welfare of both peoples.

34. In a message delivered by the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, had said that the current outbreak of violence should not lead to despair. Instead, the international community must focus its energies on finding a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and take heart from the many opinion polls of recent years that pointed to strong grass-roots support — in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory — for peaceful coexistence within the framework of a two-State solution.

35. Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, had said that, given the present situation of deepening disarray, there was no hope for economic development in Palestine without ensuring political stability and security first. In an effort to promote stability and generate trust among the peoples in the region, Japan had proposed creating a corridor for peace and prosperity in cooperation with Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. The concept was to work collaboratively on projects to promote regional cooperation, such as establishing an agro-industrial park in the West Bank and facilitating goods transport.

36. Mr. Hans van Ginkel, Rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, had stressed the importance of dialogue and the ability to listen in an increasingly complex and interrelated world. It was important to emphasize points of agreement, rather than discord. He had expressed the hope that the discussions would promote mutual understanding and identify small steps that could be taken.

37. The Chairman of the Committee had also had a message distributed, in which he had said that the Committee considered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be at the heart of the ongoing problems in the Middle East. Without a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine, peace in the Middle East would not be achieved. The Committee was determined to pursue its mandate — namely, to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — until that goal had been achieved.

38. The Seminar had been divided into four panels, which had addressed the following issues: challenges and opportunities for the new emergency Palestinian Government and Israel; the regional dimension — the role of neighbouring countries in the Middle East peace process; regional economic cooperation; and the challenges of civil society initiatives for Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

39. It had been agreed at the previous year's Seminar in Moscow that the annual Seminar should not be an end in itself, but a platform for continuous dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian civil society. In that regard, the Chairman of the Steering Committee for the Israeli-Palestinian Civil Society Initiative had presented the challenges of current initiatives involving intercommunity cooperation at the local level and participants had explored ways of promoting further intercommunity cooperation and the critical role of the media in that regard.

40. After two days of lively and frank discussion, the Seminar had concluded its work, with many speakers emphasizing the positive role of such meetings in promoting mutual understanding and proving the importance of communication, even in a time of tension. Closing the Seminar's concluding panel,

entitled "The way forward", the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had expressed the hope that, step by step, such events could bring closer the objectives of peace, prosperity and security in the region. Summarizing the Seminar's proceedings, he had said that both small and big steps had been proposed on the political, economic and social fronts. Some participants had emphasized that, along with political discussions, economic and social initiatives were urgently needed to promote confidence between the parties. Local governments, civil society, NGOs and individuals must work together to overcome problems.

41. The Seminar had also heard a forceful call for a revitalization of the peace process via videoconference from the West Bank. Mr. Riyad al-Hassen, Head of the Palestinian Public Information Service and Media Adviser to President Abbas, had said that the situation was at boiling point. A resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian question would remove one of the detonators from the hands of radical forces and create hope for the future. He had also expressed the hope that it would be possible to restart talks without conditions or preconditions.

42. On the issue of civil society cooperation, the Seminar had heard presentations by the Chairman and members of the Steering Committee for the Israeli-Palestinian Civil Society Initiative, launched after the previous year's Seminar. They had reported on various initiatives involving intercommunity cooperation in education, science and technology, public health, employment, and urban and environmentally sustainable coastal development. They had also explored ways to promote further cooperation with the involvement of regional and international actors. The Steering Committee's Chairman had said that, with the players on the ground ready to cooperate, it was important to help them launch their initiatives to address common concerns. He proposed holding a workshop to assess how to move forward, under the leadership of the United Nations system and with the participation of donors and international organizations. An institutional structure should be put in place to coordinate international support.

43. By way of conclusion, he said that the Seminar had concluded successfully. Even though there had been some tense moments in the exchanges of views between Israeli and Arab participants, by the end of the Seminar their relationship had thawed considerably. That thawing of relations had been the best outcome of the dialogue.

44. **The Chairman** said that the Seminar had clearly been a huge success. The Committee and the Department of Public Information must continue to work together to maximize the impact of the seminars for the Committee, the Secretary-General and all partners who were working for the Palestinian cause and peace in the Middle East.

United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace

45. **The Chairman** drew attention to working paper No. 4, which contained the draft provisional programme for the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

46. At the suggestion of the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, the Bureau had been in contact with the European Parliament in Brussels with a view to exploring the possibility of holding the Conference there. A decision had still not been taken. In the meantime, and in accordance with the Committee's programme of work for 2007, the Secretariat had made tentative arrangements for the Conference to be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva during the last week of August.

47. The objective of the Conference was to give civil society organizations from all regions an opportunity to discuss the situation on the ground, share information about their activities, develop action-oriented proposals in support of the Palestinian people and coordinate future initiatives. The Conference would be held in two plenary sessions and would also provide for a number of workshops. Invitations would be sent to internationally renowned experts, including Israelis and Palestinians, civil society representatives, including members of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine, parliamentarians and others. United Nations Member States and Observers, representatives of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations and the media would be invited to attend as observers.

48. If there were no comments, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the draft provisional programme contained in working paper No. 4.

49. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

50. **Mr. Al-Bader** (Observer for Qatar) proposed inviting Mr. Tony Blair, the new Quartet Representative, to participate in some of the Committee's activities so that members might become more acquainted with his position and his ideas for the peace process.

51. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) wondered whether the Quartet experts could be invited to address and engage in dialogue with the Committee. The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for example, was a Quartet member. If the Quartet accepted the idea, its new Representative could also be included.

52. **The Chairman** said that the proposal was a good one, but needed to be discussed further, along with all the other initiatives that had been proposed in the past but were yet to materialize. There was a need for more open dialogue with all the partners working on the question of Palestine. One issue for discussion, for example, was the role that the Secretary-General could play, as a Quartet member, in terms of delivering the Committee's message to Quartet meetings.

53. The Committee had always been open to any initiatives that stemmed from a sincere desire to help resolve the question of Palestine. However, some partners were reluctant to recognize that the Committee, as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, was responsible for the question of Palestine.

The meeting rose at noon.